

## PARTED by FATE.

by FRANK LEE BENEDICT.

I.

The heavy gates clanged behind them, the carriage rolled swiftly up the winding avenue, and presently the mansion-house appeared among the great trees, the setting sun lighting its casements like an illumination over this return that was to make the old house so joyous.

"We are home, Agatha; you had not forgotten how it looked?"

Agatha Bourne did not answer her father; she was leaning out of the window, gazing about in search of familiar objects, wondering that there should be no trace of change during this term of absence, which had brought her back as unlike her former self as if she had been transformed into a new being.

The suns of eighty summers have shone, and their roses bloomed, since the time of which I write, weaving no romance, only a history, gathered from faded letters and journals, that have outlived the hands which penned them.

Agatha Bourne had been gone two years; and from eighteen to twenty life passes so rapidly that one marvels to revisit the quiet haunts of childhood, and find that while existence has deepened into feverish unrest they have suffered no change.

"Does it look like home, Agatha?" her father kept questioning.

Agatha leaned back in her seat, and allowed her veil to fall over her face as she answered,

"Not a leaf is changed! It might be the enchanted castle in old nurse's fairy story, for any alteration there is."

She had returned! Often, during the first year of her stay in that foreign land, Agatha had dreamed of coming back, and had fancied the perfect content that would fill her heart as the familiar hill and dwelling came in sight. She had returned; the clang of the heavy gates had sounded like the shutting of a tomb, and her soul seemed to read, on the gray front of the house, the dreary line from the old Italian poet, that only a few months before she had dreamed over under the orange-trees of his beautiful land.

The carriage stopped at the great entrance. Agatha was assisted out by her father, and stood for an instant gazing down upon the landscape spread beneath the height on which the mansion stood. The Hudson gleamed a golden scroll in the evening light; the mountains were misty with the purple haze of early summer, and the wild, picturesque scene were its fullest beauty.

Only a moment, then her father claimed her attention again; and out of the house, roused by the sound of the carriage-wheels, came stately aunt Dorothy to fold her in an embrace of chilly delight; and old nurse, with as hearty a burst of weeping as if it had been the saddest, instead of the most joyful day of her life, as she felt and pronounced it. A whole troop of servants and dogs to welcome back the young mistress, and she knew that she ought to be glad to see them, to be grateful for the affection, and was, only there was no warmth in her heart; and it was dreadful to feel that even this moment could not bring the brightness and zest back to her life.

A beautiful old place that stands today scarcely changed, which even then had no chilling appearance of newness, for, more than a quarter of a century before, Agatha's father had built the house in the midst of that stately wood, as a summer-home for his young wife. Children had been born and died there; and last of all, the wife and mother had been carried out to sleep in the family-vault, and Roger Bourne was left alone with the helpless babe, whose little life had cost him so dearly.

Two years before, Mr. Bourne had consented that Agatha should be taken abroad by a maternal relative to finish her studies, and have a

glimpse of the great world beyond seas. How hard a trial it was to give her up the old man never told; the state of his health did not permit any thought of his accompanying her, but whatever seemed best for the child must be done; and it was feared that she inherited the delicate constitution of her mother, whom late in life Roger Bourne had married while she was still a young girl—so every way the necessity of the separation was forced upon him.

But she was at home now—his Agatha, his one priceless treasure—not a child or girl any longer, but developed into a woman more beautiful even than the child had promised, yet perplexing and troubling him a little by the difference.

He led her into the house, and aunt Dorothy followed as primly as if she had been the goddess of Propriety; though nurse somewhat disturbed the stateliness of the scene by making unexpected dashes at her former charge, with such doleful sobs of delight that the very dogs howled as if it had been a funeral.

Agatha knew that her father was watching every look, and tried by affectionate words to make amends for the lack of joy that she feared was in her face. Years before, the heavy carved furniture that decorated the rooms had been brought from across seas, and everything was so rich and picturesque that Agatha might have fancied herself standing in some old world mansion in the sunny land of France. But all this was only another pang. She would rather have come back to the humblest dwelling, in which there should be no object to remind her of that life which had come so suddenly to an end, between which and her present the ocean shut out all hope of restoration as completely as if it had been the eternal gulf.

"You are sure you are glad to be at home, Agatha?" her father questioned, with the restless eagerness of affection.

"I am glad to be anywhere with you, papa," he answered.

"And you'll not regret France, and all its vanities!"

"I was glad to come away," she said, with energy; "very glad."

"Ah, ha, Dorothy!" cried the delighted old man, "you see foreign ways haven't spoiled her, after all."

"I never supposed they would, brother," returned the spinster, severely; "Agatha had been too thoroughly grounded in her catechism and ethics to be injured by the frivolity of French manners, or those of her cousin, either, for that matter."

"You see, your aunt doesn't forgive her old enemy yet," Mr. Bourne said, laughing.

"I feel no enmity toward any one," answered Miss Dorothy, with increased dignity. "I trust my mind is too well disciplined to entertain any such dreadful sentiment. I don't think about Mrs. Masterton when I can help it; she seems to have done Agatha no harm, so let us be thankful and forget her till she comes to upset the house by one of her summer visits."

"Thankful enough I am to get her back," said Mr. Bourne; and Agatha felt a more ungrateful wretch than ever.

Aunt Dorothy bustled away, beset by some housewifely care—for, like most women of that generation, she gave herself and those about her no more rest than if they had all been machines, that must run without stopping until they broke down.

That night, as she sat alone in her room, Agatha Bourne looked back over the events of the past, which had so utterly come to an end, that she felt as a ghost might while reviewing the scene of its earthly mistakes and suffering.

I have read, in the faded records kept in her own dainty penmanship, the history of that lost past, but I shall give it to you in my own words. Even at this distance of time there seems something coarse and cruel in laying bare to the glance of the indifferent the entire secrets of that girlish soul, written with all the impulsiveness and passion of her age, never meant to

be intrusted to any human eye, but which by some chance have so long outlasted the misery and wounded pride that gave them birth.

The first eighteen months of Agatha's sojourn had been spent in study or traveling about Italy; but when only half a year of her stay was left, and Mr. Bourne would not hear of her absence being prolonged a day after the appointed time, Mrs. Masterton took her niece back to France, that she might have a glance at the gorgeous court, where, in spite of gathering troubles, Marie Antoinette ruled more potently by the spells of her beauty and grace than ever the great conqueror who followed did in the fullness of his success.

Agatha's season of gayety was a very bright one, and she was so much sought after, that silly little Mrs. Masterton began to dream, as so many American women of our day do, of a crown prince, at least, for her charge. But Agatha would have laughed scornfully at the vision of a royal highness, if it had been confided to her, for she was living in one of those marvelous cloud-castles which most of us have built somewhere in our youth, and deemed so secure that they would resist the combined attacks of time and fate.

Once every week Agatha went to the house of an old French lady, whose mild entertainments Mrs. Masterton abhorred, though she was anxious not to offend her for the sake of certain relatives the ancient dame possessed, who did give invitations worth accepting; so she was glad to allow Agatha to do double duty on madame's evenings, and as the girl was a great favorite, Mrs. Masterton might have been astonished to discover how seldom she herself was missed.

Agatha met the hero of her dream there, and for months that sombre old saloon was the most beautiful spot on earth to her. She had gone to dine with madame, as was frequently her habit on the days of the receptions—but she did not find her friend, as usual, alone.

"Come in, my dear," the old lady said, as Agatha paused involuntarily on the threshold. "You are astonished that I do not play solitary as usual. But here is another kind heart besides your own that comes to see how the old lady fares, and I have promised if he is good that we will give him

some dinner. Miss Bourne, this is my nephew, Mr. Cairn —ma foi , it is grand-nephew that I should say, but that makes me seem too ancient."

And madame rattled on with her pretty French eagerness, while Robert Cairn rose from his seat, and Agatha returned his salute, glancing with a shyness that she did not often feel toward the pale, handsome face, whose every change was soon to become so familiar to her.

"Yes, my grand-nephew; think of that, my little Agatha—it makes me seem like one of the fossils, does it not? But my pretty niece would marry a solemn Scotchman; and not content with that bit of insanity, she followed him off to America, and they are both dead, and only this great boy left to come back once in awhile and remind me of what is gone."

"That is giving you my family history in very few words, Miss Bourne," Cairn said, in English.

"And you are an American?" Agatha asked, in surprise.

"I understand," cried madame; "do not think to cheat my old ears with the English. Of course, he is American—all that there is of most so." she said, in broken idiom.

"Miss Bourne does not seem inclined to acknowledge me as a countryman," Cairn said, with a grave smile.

"Oh, yes, she replied. "Only it is unusual to meet Americans of your age here—generally they are too much occupied at home."

His face altered so quickly that she thought her heedless speech had annoyed him; but as it was difficult to know what to say, she was dropping into an awkward silence, when madame interposed volubly in her own tongue, not venturing to attempt the harsh English consonants, though she comprehended the language when spoken.

"He must come sometimes to see the old aunt," she said. "I am Robert's nearest kin; he is to live in Europe, hey, my boy?"

He bowed, and reverently kissed the hand which she extended to him, so dainty and white yet, in spite of her age.

"Have you lately left America, Mr. Cairn? Agatha asked, in hopes to make amends for her former speech.

"I have not been there since I was a boy. I was not quite eighteen when I came away," he replied, so stiffly that again she felt as if she had been guilty of an unwarrantable liberty, and had three minds to take an aversion to the stately young man without delay.

"It is years since," added madame, looking fondly at him. "He seems so young, one would not take him for past seven-and-twenty, eh, Agatha?"

Agatha made no answer at all, she would not incur another forbidding glance from the solemn, gray eyes. She was just a little spoiled by the flattery of the past months, and began to wish herself at home instead of being doomed to conversation with this mon, who seemed to disapprove of everything she said.

But her pouting mood did not last long; for, without the slightest warning, Robert Cairn warmed into a sunny, genial demeanor, and talked so pleasantly that the dinner passed off in the most charming way, and Agatha was quite vexed when it was over, and the guests began to arrive. But even then she did not lose Robert Cairn's society. Madame's elderly friends played trictrac, and he staid by her; but they-were all too busy with their game to notice the pair.

From that time she saw him almost daily, and her dream grew into full beauty with the rapidity natural to her age. There was much about the man that she could not understand; a reticence which made her feel that there was a secret in his life that troubled him; strange alternations of manner, for which she could not account; but all these things did not weigh heavily enough to dispel the brightness of her vision.

The day came when with her womanly intuitions she knew that he loved her. and, in spite of her pride, she was glad to let her heart repeat the words. Yet he did not speak. There was the most delicate interest and

attention—he showed plainly enough that his chief pleasure at this time was to arrange his days so that he might be most in her society; every glance of his sad eyes uttered his secret—but he did not speak.

The time for Agatha's departure was drawing near. It had not been mentioned in Cairn's presence, until one day when he came in and found her sitting with madame, the old lady said, abruptly,

"What will we do, Robert, when she is gone?"

"Gone?" he repeated. "Where is she going?"

"Home, of course—to that dreadful America, a whole world off over the seas, and among the savages!"

Robert Cairn muttered some unintelligible reply, and moved to the window; but Agatha caught sight of his face as he turned away. If he had been dead and cold, it could not have looked whiter and more ghastly.

Madame was busy with her netting, and her dim eyes did not see what was plain enough to Agatha, and she chattered on about her grief and desolation until, fond as she was of her, the girl felt an insane desire to choke her like a croaking blackbird.

"Is not this very sudden?" he asked, at length, still keeping his stand by the window.

"Of course not," returned madame. "You heard from the first that she had only three months to stay. I have the heart broken."

But, grieved as she was, she could not be oblivious to the fact that she needed some silk of a peculiar tint of blue, and if she sent her maid to look for it, she would bring back a dozen sorts, and neither of them the right color; so she must go into her bed-room and search for herself, and not disturb Manon, who was nearly as old as her mistress, and much blinder, with a temper which madame dreaded.

"This is very sudden to me," Robert Cairn said, approaching Agatha, as



his ancient relative trotted nimbly away with some apology that neither heard.

"The time was set before I came from Italy," Agatha replied, without looking up. "I have been away a long while, and my father cannot spare me any longer."

"But we are to spare you, it seems," he said, sharply. "Is no one but him to feel?"

There was no answer possible to that speech, so Agatha sat quite still.

"I am going away tomorrow for a few days," he said, abruptly; "so I shall have a foretaste of what it is like to lose you."

It was an odd thing to say; it made Agatha shiver with wounded pride, and fear lest she might have betrayed something of the agitation which stirred her very soul. She forced herself to speak then, and made her voice quiet and careless.

"Perhaps you will wander over to America, some time," she said and we may chance to meet."

"I shall never go back to America," he answered, in the hard tone that his voice sometimes took.

Was that said to make her understand that the story of the past weeks had come to an end? The very cruelty of the words helped to bring back her strength. The recollection of every blush that his searching glance had ever brought into her face; the half-confessions that her eyes had uttered in response to the passionate tenderness in his, rushed up and overwhelmed her with maidenly shame. But she would betray no weakness, if she died there in her seat; she should be no sign of the agony which began to darken her soul like the gathering blackness that precedes a tempest.

"I had thought it might be different," he went on, after a brief pause, "but I have my life mapped out for me now."

"Since you have done it, you must be satisfied," Agatha said; and through the whirl in her brain she could hear that her voice sounded cold and unconcerned—and she was glad.

"At all event it is done," he said; "whether by my own will or not, can make no difference now."

If madame, in her secret heart, wished the pair ever so much to fall in love, her rigid French ideas of propriety, where young ladies were concerned, would not permit her to leave them longer alone; so she came trotting out of her bed-room, with the blue silk in her hand, talking as fast as ever.

In a little while Mrs. Masterton called to take Agatha home, and as her name was announced Robert Cairn took his leave, with no other farewell for Agatha than that odd conversation they had held during the moment of madame's absence.

II.

Agatha got home and away from her frivolous relative, and alone in her own room could review the events of the past months, and through her trouble and cruel mortification, see how her beautiful cloud-palace was falling in ruins at her feet.

They only met twice after that, both times at little entertainments given Mrs. Masterton before her departure, and there was no word or look that the most ordinary acquaintance might not have bestowed. He said farewell to her when others were doing it—held her hand for an instant in his own, and added, gravely,

"Such a parting makes me understand what death is like. You will have a prosperous voyage, I am sure of that; may a long and happy life follow."

He was gone; and as Agatha Bourne watched him pass down the room, she knew that they had parted forever.

Then came the tedious voyage, the solitary hours, the long days and nights in which, having nothing to occupy her thoughts, they dwelt with wearisome persistence upon one theme, and nearly drove her mad with shame and anguish.

She had given her heart to this man,—she had loved him; and she asked herself bitterly, from what encouragement? A few tender looks; idle words of compliment, that had seemed to her fraught with deeper meaning; from the sort of mystery and romance which her girlish fancy had imagined invested his life. It had been all the vainest, most empty gallantry on his part; she had shown that she was pleased by his attentions; it had gratified his miserable man's vanity to lure her deeper into her beautiful dreams, to see that his coming made her eyes brighten, that his whispered words could move her to the very heart; and, to add to the bitterness of her lesson, he had felt it necessary to let her see plainly at the last how she had deceived herself.

It was horrible suffering to a proud woman. When the tiresome weeks were over, and they landed in America, it seemed to Agatha Bourne that she had lived years during that season. Terrible as it was to bear the ceaseless ache at her heart, the shame and humiliation were worse. Every recollection of that time must be wrenched from her soul, or she should go mad outright—that was the work before her.

So she took up life in the home of her childhood, and bore her burden as best she could. There were seasons when even her father's affection and aunt's kindness were insupportable torture; when the friends that came about her were odious, with their expressions of interest; when the earth was a prison-house, and the blue heavens only a pitiless roof that shut out all hope.

This was her inner life; outwardly it showed fair enough, and Agatha allowed no evidence of her unrest to be visible. There were numerous visitors at the house—Mrs. Masterton and her train of idle friends, many of the most prominent people of the period—and Agatha was the center of attraction, with her beauty and wit, while every pleasure was tasteless as ashes.

There was one man oftener a guest than any other—a son of Mr. Bourne's old friend, and formerly his ward. Hugh Morland was past thirty, now; and he had lived during a period that made men develop and age rapidly.

Agatha had known him all her life, and he had seemed almost like an elder brother to her. Even now his society was more agreeable than that of any human being; and though he could not have the slightest suspicion of the story which made her days one round of regret and humiliation, he seemed, oddly enough, as she often thought, to have a faculty of showing her a little light in her darkness, and through his wise, gentle counsels she came at last to understand that, however ruinous the trouble which scathed her heart, the world had not yet come to an end.

Events culminated rapidly in Agatha's life at this period. In less than four months after her return she was an orphan—her father died of a brief illness, which was hardly considered serious until a few hours before his death.

She spent the winter in the old house with aunt Dorothy, and Hugh Morland's visits were the only break in the monotony!-- They were pleasant to Agatha; and she grew to lean more and more upon his friendship and sympathy. She was a great heiress for those days, and when she chose to emerge from her seclusion, there would be a brilliant career before her. But the power of enjoyment was gone out of her nature—she only longed to be quiet. Any thought of returning to Europe was abhorrent to her. The slightest reference from aunt Dorothy to the season she had spent there made Agatha feel so wicked and cross that it was difficult to conceal it; and she took herself often severely to task for finding the amiable old spinster such a wearing and tiresome companion.

One night that Hugh Morland staid there, aunt Dorothy went early to bed, in hopes of forgetting a nervous headache, and the two young people were left together in the library that Agatha made her usual abiding place of an evening, in preference to the great wilderness of a drawing-room, which she pronounced unendurable, unless filled with people.

Sitting there in the stillness, Hugh Morland told her his story—the secret

which he had kept in his heart so long, which he had hardly meant to tell then, though it had lain close to his lips during these months, which he knew had pressed so hardly upon her.

She was startled; the words brought her a kind of pain, too, yet it was pleasant to think there was one human being in the world who held her so dear.

"Have I frightened you?" he asked, quickly. "Was I too abrupt?"

"I had not thought of this," she answered; "you have been so good to me, like a kind, elder brother."

"And that is all?"

"I've never thought of you in any other way," she said. "Don't be vexed with me, Hugh—I don't mean to be unkind."

"I know that, Agatha. But I have loved you so long; I think no man will ever love you better."

"I think in the whole world there can be no man whose love would be better worth having," she answered.

"Take care!" he said, tremulously; "that is almost a hope, Agatha."

"I believe I mean it for one," she said, honestly. "But I must be just to you. I must take time to think."

"And you shall have it—I will not tease you. When may I come back for my answer? See, I have to be here again in a week—will you answer me then?"

She bowed her head in sign of assent—and for the rest of the evening he was the gentle, patient friend she had always found him.

Then followed a week of solitude for Agatha, but before it ended her mind was made up. She would marry Hugh Morland; her life was go

dreary and empty, and in his love she should find new hopes and interests. She haughtily shut out of her soul every thought of the past; shuddered with abhorrence at the recollection of her own weakness and self-deception, and marveled that she could have allowed herself to waste regrets over a man who had proved so mean and empty a trifler.

Hugh Morland came back to the old house, and on the evening of his arrival, when they chanced to be alone, he said; quietly,

"How is it to be, Agatha?

She laid her hand shyly in his extended palm, and the next instant she felt herself strained to his heart with passionate tenderness.

"I thank God for giving me this new blessing!" he said solemnly. "I will try to make you happy, Agatha. I am odd and reticent, but I shall not be so with you; and you will tell me when I am wrong—we' will help each other."

"You are only too good to me, Hugh," she answered. "It is I who have a host of faults to be cured of. But there is something else I ought to tell you."

She hesitated a little, but she had decided that it was right to tell him everything about her poor little dream, and its effects upon her mind, though it was humiliating to confess that she had been duped by her own vanity, if the blame was not thrown upon the object of her romance. But Hugh listened so patiently, and helped her out in her confession so kindly, that, after all, it was not half so bitter to tell the story to him as it was sometimes to think about it. He treated the whole matter lightly—not her pain—he was gentle and sympathizing there; but he proved so convincingly that it was only a bit of girlish romance, that Agatha believed so, too, for the time, put the whole weary history out of her mind, and hoped that she had done with it forever.

Aunt Dorothy was delighted in her prim, proper way, when she was informed of their engagement; and there was no one else whom Agatha considered it her duty to consult, never having been able to give into the prevalent idea that every human being able to claim the slightest

relationship has a right to meddle in one's private affairs.

The winter softened into spring, and outwardly Agatha's existence passed in its old unvarying routine. But there was a great change perceptible to herself; there was a feeling of rest and peace in the consciousness of Hugh's loving care, that kept the loneliness and coldness out of her days. What her own feelings were she found it difficult to analyze; indeed, during that season she gave herself little opportunity to do so, content to float passively on, afraid of anything which might disturb her repose. But as the months glided by, Hugh began at last to plead for an end to his term of probation.

"I want you—I need you so much," he said. "My darling, I have tried to be good and patient; I would not distress you for the world, but I shall never have rest or peace until you are my wife."

He had his way; the time for their marriage was set, but from that hour the quiet that had surrounded Agatha like a charmed atmosphere was broken up, and the old fears and unrest came back. Seldom in his society, she could banish thought then, and find repose and strength in his tenderness; but there were many days when she was alone with her troubled fancies, and the darkness grew so heavy that she was at a loss how to turn. It was difficult to talk to Hugh of her feelings—not easy to explain them to herself. She could not bring her pride to admit that the old dream still held her in its thrall—it seemed such shame to her womanhood, that she shrunk from it as from some degrading thought.

The days passed into weeks; summer blossomed and died; the early autumn came; a year had elapsed since her father's death.

It was at the close of a beautiful September day that Agatha Bourne stood in her chamber gazing at her own image reflected in the mirror—looking with a sort of wonder at the unfamiliar white raiment, and the shining pearls upon her neck and arms. She was to be married that night, yet it all seemed like a dream. She had shut out aunt Dorothy and her old nurse, and dressed without assistance—she wanted to be alone. There she stood and stared at herself, and wondered if it could all be real, and grew afraid of the sudden tempest that billowed within her soul.

It was early yet, the sun was just setting; she should have a full hour to herself before Hugh, or the few guests invited would arrive.- She took up a silk mantle that lay on the bed, wrapped it about her, and went down by a private stair-case which led from her room into the old-fashioned garden.

It was a lovely spot, the high wall covered by flowering vines, the autumn blossoms exhaling a faint perfume, like the breath of summer, and a solemn stillness all about which subdued the tumult in Agatha's mind.

As she stood there, she heard her name pronounced. She could not believe that she had heard aright—often her senses had mocked her with the sound of that voice; again she heard it call,

"Agatha! Agatha!"

The next instant Robert Cairn was by her side, holding her hands in his, pouring out a torrent of incoherent words, while she stood there white as a ghost, the solid earth seeming to reel beneath her feet like a ship at sea.

"Don't you know me, Agatha?" he cried. "Didn't you believe that I would ever come? Agatha! Agatha! Say that you are glad to see me! Say that you forgive what seemed my coldness and tacit falsehood. I could not speak then, I was bound hand and foot. I have come to tell you the truth now."

The heavens seemed settling down in an awful night, through which Agatha could alone see that, face; but in the midst of her despair she knew that whatever lie had come to say, it was too late—she must not hear.

His head was bowed upon her hand. She could catch his tumultuous breathing as he tried to regain composure enough to speak. She had no strength to withdraw her hand—the other clutched the necklace that encircled her throat; the long mantle fell off, trailing over the ground, and displaying her white attire.



"Are you glad to see me, Agatha?" he repeated. "Let me say at once what I came to tell you—I love you—I love you..."

She drew her hand quickly away; she heard her voice, cold and stony, as if she had been dead.

"Hush!" it groaned. "Whatever you came for, it is too late—in an hour I am to be married."

Cairn started to his feet, gazed for an instant into her eyes with an agony that was like the pangs of death; then, without a word, he rushed away not casting a single glance back.

III.

Through the mist and whirl which blurred her sight Agatha Bourne saw him go—she knew that it was forever. Never again in this world to hear his voice, to see his face! She could not bear it. Fate and heaven were too cruel upon her. The gates of Paradise had opened for an instant and closed, only to leave her in a darkness more complete and terrible than that which had surrounded her during the most poignant suffering of the past.

He must go, she had no right to call him back; amid the confusion of her senses she could realize that. Yet some inarticulate words broke from her lips as she sunk upon the stone bench, and shut the light out with her shuddering hands.

Robert Cairn turned; there was such confession in the drooping, despairing attitude, that he would have been more than human if he could have found strength to go. She heard his step close beside her again, and looked up to meet his troubled eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I ought to have gone; just a moment longer--only to hear you speak once more."

Agatha's hands dropped into her lap; she sat quiet, looking up at him with

a ghost of a smile on her lips.

"It is good-by," she said, faintly.

"I can't believe it!" he exclaimed, passionately. "It must be some horrible dream."

"Only dreams come to an end," Agatha murmured, "and life goes on—goes on."

"Didn't you know that I would come?" he cried out, with a man's impatience and recklessness, "Didn't you understand that I loved you, and would come if Fate ever set me free?"

"I mustn't hear," she answered, in a voice so cold and hollow that it might have proceeded from a stone image; "you must not tell me."

"For my sake, Agatha, let me be selfish enough to set myself right in your eyes! If we were dead and meeting in another world, I should be free to tell you—this is like death, I must speak."

She could have borne her own pain, but not his. She would do anything to soften the de- lat whitened his face.

"God remembers the living and the dead," she whispered; "try to think of that."

"I won't ask you about yourself, Agatha, I have no right; but I can't have you think me so utterly heartless and mean as I have been forced to appear. Did you believe me so, Agatha?"

"I tried," she said. "I may speak the truth now—I did try."

"But you felt that there was some reason back— some secret which would make me seemed less heartless, if I could explain?"

"Yes; I felt that," she replied; "but I had no right to think! You had never told me that—that "

"That I loved you? No; I did not dare, though it used to seem that the silence would drive me mad! I did not put it in words, but every word and look showed it; you had a right to expect that I would speak—it was more despicable than if I had broken the most solemn engagement."

"No," returned she, unable to bear that even his lips should utter such reproach of her old idol. "I was a foolish girl, unused to the world—"

"Don't!" he broke in. "I can't bear it! I say if I had done this wantonly, it would have been a meaner sin than a lie openly uttered; but I was not wicked, Agatha, only very weak!"

I ought never to have seen you after that first meeting, for when I left you that morning I knew already what you would be to me. But I could not stay away. Impassable as the barrier was between us, I could not deprive myself of the happiness of being near you, of hearing you speak. Oh! those weeks, those weeks!"

The very words that Agatha's aching heart had so often repeated; as she looked back through the after darkness upon that season, they found an echo in her soul now, but she shut her lips firmly and did not trust herself even to glance toward his face. She could not refuse him this opportunity of clearing himself; they must part forever: in all their lives to come there would be no second meeting; but she must let him speak now. She did not remember how much harder her burden would be to bear when his memory was freed from every doubt; she did not think of herself at all, only of him and his pain, and at any cost of suffering she would have listened.

"Do you remember them, Agatha?" he cried. "How bright they were! I would not think. I just dreamed on and shut my eyes to the end, that I knew must come."

It might have been the voice of her own heart lamenting over its beautiful vision—so many times it had uttered the same complaint. She could not speak yet, could not look at him; could only breathe a silent prayer for strength, for mercy upon them both.

"You didn't know it, Agatha," he went on, "but your own lips spoke the words that doomed me to go from you without even clearing up the secret that darkened my life."

She looked toward him now with a sort of despairing wonder in her face. Through the trouble in her brain there came the thought that, if she had done or said that which had made him believe she did not care for him, would it not be better if she could send him away now with the same belief? He might suffer less in thinking her coquettish and false than in knowing that her pain equaled his. But she could not do it; he must see the whole truth—as if they were both dead, she repeated to herself. She remembered the thrall that bound her; Hugh's patient, tender face rose before her; she would be true to her promise; but she could have no concealments from this man now.

"What did I say?" she asked. "What did I do?"

"I could not have asked your love—I would not have wronged you by asking you to share my fate—nameless, disgraced exile that I was; but at least I could have told you the whole truth."

"And my words kept you from it? I don't understand—I don't understand."

The sharp pain in her voice would have revealed her share in his suffering, if she had hoped to conceal it—but she had no care to do so.

"Do you recollect what you said one day about our country—of the war—the fate that any man deserved upon whom even a suspicion rested of having proved false to his duty.

"Yes, I recollect."

"That sealed my lips."

"You don't mean that it applied to you?" she exclaimed. "I don't believe it—I will not believe it."

"Ah! thank you," returned he, in a tone that was fuller of pathos than any tears could have been; "do not believe it! But then I was powerless to bring the slightest proof to aid my word, and in men's eyes I was guilty."

"I should have known you were not," she cried, as eagerly as if she were defending his fair fame against some unjust accuser; "you might have trusted me."

"It could have changed nothing," he answered; "I must have seen you go just the same. If I had told you my poor story—if you had believed that I was innocent, it could not have broken down the barrier that separated me from you. I should have had no right to ask you to link your life with that of a man under suspicion and disgrace. If you had been willing, it would have been cowardly to accept such a sacrifice at your hands."

"But you came to tell me now," she said.

"Because how I have the right! Don't you understand Agatha? My name has been cleared from the stain that covered it—I may claim it again. But when we first met, if you had heard me called Robert Rothsay, would you not have shrunk from me, and remembered the history attached to it?"

She comprehended everything now connected with his past, save the name by which his innocence had been established.

"No wonder you start, Agatha; no wonder, if you are afraid yet to believe in my honesty when I speak that name."

"I was not afraid—I do believe," she said, quickly. She was stretching forth her hand to lay it in his in token of assurance, but she remembered that she had no right; another man's kisses yet tingled on the palm: it was not hers to offer.

"I used to think nobody could," he went on, with a mournful calmness, "so I called myself by a name that belonged to my father's family, and at least was spared the shame of being denounced and spurned by any of my countrymen that I might chance to meet. It has been a long, long time to bear the load, Agatha—more than nine years that I have not heard my

own name spoken; have wandered about the old world in a dreary exile, which I thought in this life could have no end."

Poor Robert, she murmured, softly, unconsciously she had uttered the name that had grown so familiar to her lips long before.

It was hard enough, Agatha; but, oh, my God! I did not know what pain was till now! To stand cleared before the world; to be able to speak, to find it too late!"

He broke off with a shudder, and buried his face in his hands; and Agatha crouched lower upon the bench where she had seated herself, not venturing to watch his anguish. Presently she heard his voice again, speaking with the despairing calmness which had steadied it when he began his story.

"I did not mean to say that, Agatha—I'll not complain! As the dead might talk together, that was what I told you—I shall not forget again. I want to tell you, myself—you will hear it from others; but let me tell you."

"Yes, yes—go on; let me hear it from you."

"You know the bare details as the world knew them. It was said that a young lieutenant, Robert Rothsay, in the last year of the war, was believed to have held a traitorous correspondence with some of Cornwallis officers, and to have gone over to the British lines when his scheme fell through."

"Yes, I knew that. I was always sorry for him, because the whole story seemed so vague and unlikely."

"Good, kind Agatha! Ah! I might think it was Fate that had softened your heart toward me in advance, only Fate has been so cruel to us since."

He stopped suddenly—this was but a repetition of the complaint with which he had vowed not to disturb her.

"This was the whole story," he said, when he could control himself again.

"Sullivan was the colonel of my regiment, and my cousin. He hated me, because a mutual uncle, whose fortune he hoped to inherit, had quarreled with him for some misconduct, and openly avowed his intention of making me his heir.

"But he professed to be my best friend, and I, boy-like, was easily induced to trust him. He was made colonel soon after I joined the regiment, and treated me like an elder brother. He confided to me a plan by which he believed a great success might be given to our forces. But it was necessary to find some one who, for a time, would be willing to bear the odium of having deserted to the English. I can't tell you—it would be too long. I believed in his plans—I carried them out. I discovered almost at once the utter hopelessness of them, and saw clearly enough that; it had only been his intention to ruin me. I succeeded in escaping to France. Sullivan wrote to me that while the war lasted he could not set me right, because of the bad effect it might have if any similar effort needed to be attempted. That was all—I lived up under the shame. The war ended. Years passed; my uncle died believing in my guilt, and leaving his fortune to my cousin. I could not come back here; could not clear my name; could only struggle on without even a hope that the future would bring any change."

Agatha was leaning forward, her hands clasped in her lap, her very soul in the gaze she fastened on his face. As he paused, she motioned him to proceed, but did not speak.

"You came, Agatha, and went from me—but I lived! Five months ago I met Sullivan in France. I helped him when he was in great danger, but I could not save his life. When he was dying he told the truth—at least as much as would serve to leave me free from reproach. He wrote letters to leading men here, telling them that he had believed me dead, and so had neglected to do his duty before; screening his conduct as best he might; but I was glad to have him do that. There is nothing more, Agatha. I came at once to America; I landed in New York last night. I am here, and it is too late. Oh Agatha! if you had only waited."

"I think heaven would not have it so," she answered, with a piteous quiver in her voice. "I have tried to do right—I must try still. I had to put

every thought of the past from my mind—to leave it alone as I would a grave."

"But now, now?"

"Nothing is changed—don't you see? Fate has decided for us. I think we must not even talk any more—never any more in this world."

"Oh! what have I done!" he groaned, "that I should be treated so much more hardly than other men!"

"Hush! don't say that! Some time we shall know. I can't see—I can't think; but up yonder we shall understand! Try to remember that—it will help me to believe that you try."

"I will try," he said; "I promise you! If only I could have come a few month ago—only a few months. I believe you are doing right, Agatha, and yet—to save this man pain, however good and noble he may be, you break two hearts."

"They are waiting for me by this time—may come in search of me. Oh! go away—go! I am as powerless to change anything as if you had not come for a year hence."

"I see—I must go."

They stood for a little gazing in each other's face. He took her hands, held them in his own, but did not even press his lips upon them. She heard a few broken words of farewell; then once more he moved away. This time he did not look back; he passed out of a gate that led directly into the fields and disappeared.

When he had gone, Agatha walked toward the house; the ground rocked as if shaken by an earthquake; the very heavens seemed to bow, and an awful blackness gathered slowly about her, but she walked on.

She reached the steps—she was ascending them; there was a terrible rush and roar in her brain, as if the whole world had fallen into sudden



ruin. She knew only that she was caught in Hugh Morland's arms, then an insensibility, that was like the blank of death, settled upon her senses.

#### IV.

When Agatha Bourne's soul came back from that long trance, it was deep in the night. She lay upon her bed, a shaded lamp was burning in the room; her bewildered eyes caught the outlines of two figures standing at a little distance—she recognized her aunt and Hugh. Whether moments or hours had elapsed she could not tell; she remembered everything; called out some words which brought Morland to the bed.

"You must lie quiet," he whispered. "The people are all gone I have sent them away."

"Gone?" she repeated. "Gone?"

"Yes; try to understand—you were taken ill. The doctor is here—please, see him."

Agatha was conscious- that another figure stood by the bed, conscious that Hugh lifted and supported her as she made some desperate effort for breath; then everything once more faded slowly from her sight.

When Agatha's faculties again took hold of rational, reasoning life, more than a month had elapsed. The trouble and excitement of long weeks had ended in a brain fever, from which, during many terrible days and nights, there seemed no hope that she could recover.

But consciousness came back at length,- and though she was wasted and weak, the fever had left her, and the physician pronounced that her restoration to health was now only a work of time. On the day she woke, as she opened her eyes, she fancied she saw Hugh Morland rise from his chair and disappear.

"Hugh," she said.

But it was aunt Dorothy's voice that answered.

"I thought Hugh was here," continued Agatha.

"There is nobody here but me," replied her aunt.

Agatha asked for a drink. Her aunt brought it. She complained of hunger, and was allowed to eat. From that time she began to recover rapidly, and was soon able to have her bed wheeled to the window, and sit propped up among the pillows, looking out at the landscape which had lost the last trace of summer, and showed bare and gray.

Hugh did not appear again, and at length Agatha asked for him.

"Where is he? I'm sure he was here while I was ill. Why doesn't he come?"

"He is downstairs," aunt Dorothy said.

"He has hardly left the house since you were sick."

"Tell him to come up, I want to see him."

Aunt Dorothy went away, and presently Hugh came into the room. Agatha could see that he looked pale and thin, but his face was bright and cheerful, nevertheless.

"This begins to seem like getting well," he said, taking the wasted hand she held out to him. "This does us all so much good after these dreary weeks."

"I know how good you have been to me, Hugh," she said. , "lately I have known what was going on, though I could not speak—good, kind Hugh."

"Of course I am," he replied, smiling. "But you are not to be a bit sentimental; we are to laugh and grow fat, and be oysters at present."

She did laugh at that, though her lips quivered still.

"You see I kept them from cutting off your hair," he said, softly stroking the brown tresses that hung about her shoulders. "The doctor was crazy to get rid of all these curls."

"He always remembers everything," cried Agatha, and had to sob a little; but he talked playfully, and soon restored her composure.

For two or three days after he was in her room a good deal, but never unless she sent for him. He read to her' talked cheerfully of the slight things that would serve to interest an invalid, kept her thoughts pleasantly occupied, but never spoke a word of the old hopes, the old dreams.

She could think when alone; she had forgotten nothing. It seemed to her that she had been dead and brought back to life. She tried to shut out the past; but in spite of her efforts, her prayers for aid, the miserable unrest kept strength from coming back.

They allowed her to sit up one day, and after she was comfortably established in a great easy- chair, she wanted nurse to send Hugh. He came at once at her summons.

"Hush!" she said. "I want to talk to you."

"I thought you had been talking, every day, a good deal," he answered, smiling.

"Yes—but not that! I haven't forgotten, Hugh—you don't speak of it, you are afraid of troubling me; but I remember what was to have been the evening I was taken ill."

"We won't talk about those things yet," he said, kindly; "you are not strong enough."

"Yes, I am," she replied. "This silence worries me."

"Nothing must worry you, Agatha," returned he, tenderly; "nothing! Come, what crotchet of that busy brain must we set at rest?"

"It isn't that! Only I wanted to tell you how I appreciate all your goodness and patience, and to say that—that I have forgotten nothing—that I take back nothing."

His fingers played softly with a ring on one of her hands.

"Such a brave, true Agatha!" he murmured.

"I want to be, Hugh—indeed, I do! You'll help me, won't you?"

"With all my power, in every way that I can—you may be sure of that. "

"And I shall tell you just what I think?"

"Now and always, little one.

She sat still for a moment with her face turned away; but presently she looked back, trying to smile—to be his brave, true Agatha.

"I think we must not wait, unless you are tired of me," she said, slowly. "I am very fanciful, and very silly. I don't think I ought to be here by myself. I—I would rather you took me away, Hugh."

His hand lay quiet on hers. Once more she heard him murmur, softly,

"Such a brave, true Agatha!"

"A poor, weak, useless Agatha," she said, with a few quiet tears; "but I'll do my best—you'll help me, Hugh?"

"We'll both do our best, dear—be sure of that. But are you certain you are strong enough to talk about all these things?"

"Quite. I must, Hugh. I shall never get well till everything is settled. It won't harm me; see how quiet I am."

"Wait a minute," he said. He laid her hand down, and went out of the

room. Presently he came back, and sat down by her again, holding her hand fast once more. She looked at him in a strange wonder; he was very pale, but there was a look on his face such as she had never seen there, which heightened it into something higher and better than beauty.

"I am going to tell you a story," he said.

She leaned back, looking at him wonderingly.

"Yes," she said, as he seemed waiting for her to speak, "a story."

"Once upon a time, to begin as you used to like the fairy stories to" he went on, "there was a dull enough old student loved a young girl. He had loved her for a long time, and held his peace; but at last the time came when he thought that she might find more content in his care and tenderness than she could by herself— for she was not a happy girl, he knew that, though he could not understand what caused her trouble."

Agatha sat quiet, shading her eyes with one hand, the other still clasped in Hugh's.

"So he told her of his love, and she was willing to listen; she was patient and kind, and so brave. She meant to do right, and the man could know she would be helped. So she was not as either of them expected.

Are you listening, Agatha?"

She pressed his hand as a sign.

"You see human beings are very blind—and both the man and the woman were wrong, for all they wanted to be just and true to each other. The days and the weeks went on, and the time came when they were to be married—yes, almost up to the very hour; but there was a wisdom higher than their's yet to interpose.

Then came back the true prince—the man she had really loved—a noble prince, worthy of her affection. Don't stir, Agatha—I am almost through now.

“He came, this poor prince, and told her what had kept him from her; but they both thought it was too late now to claim their happiness. In their true greatness they were ready to sacrifice it to that of the «dull, old student who was better fitted to be tht giW's faithfal brother than her husband. So they parted, but strong as the dear princess, thought herself, her heart broke, and...”

“No, Hugh, no!” she interrupted. «How did you know? I am glad you do! Try to believe me—I will do right”

“Hush, dear! Didn't I say that you should. Let me tell my story out. The student came into the garden, and was forced to listen. After the first he knew that he ought to stay and hear it all—that God had sent him, lest he should be guilty of a great wickedness. Do you know what the end was, Agatha?”

“Yes,” she gasped. “The girl kept her held his peace; but at last the time came when word—in time she would come to think of the past as the dead do——”

“That would not have been true bravery,” he interrupted, gently, “though she would have meant it to be. That was not the end, little one. The prince was found, brought back to his lost idol; and it was the old student who gained a higher happiness than anything else could have given him, in bringing the pair face to face. Agatha, look up!”

The door opened. Like one in a dream she watched Robert Rothsay enter. She saw Hugh lead him toward her, felt him join their hands, hear his voice again,

“God bless you both! and God be praised for the end!”

Smiling to the last, he went away and left them together—the fairy story had become reality.

Hugh Morland lived almost up to the time in which I write; and I think I never heard of a more quietly happy life than his was. God seemed to

ask nothing but that one act of renunciation on his part to make him fit for a peace and rest such as few souls are worthy to attain this side of heaven.

Robert Rothsay and his wife lived long to enjoy their happiness, their wealth, their position, the love of beautiful children: and always the most welcome visitor at their hearth was Hugh Morland.

When they did go away to the life beyond this, they were happy to the last in being permitted to depart so nearly together, that one could fancy Rothsay's soul waiting a few hours on the threshold of its new existence till hers was ready to follow. Hugh Morland remained, but the children of the pair for whom he had given up his youth, were left, too; and their devotion brightened his great age with a loving solicitude, such as is granted to few who are forced to linger on beyond the narrow span of years mercifully appointed to most men.

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